

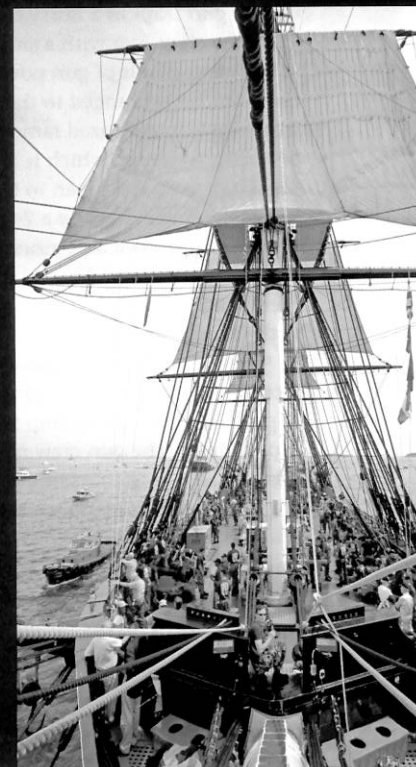
▼▼ Sailors assigned to USS **Constitution** salute the amphibious assault ship USS **Wasp** (LHD 1), during **Constitution's** July 4th annual turnaround cruise during Boston Navy Week. (MCC William Clark/USN)

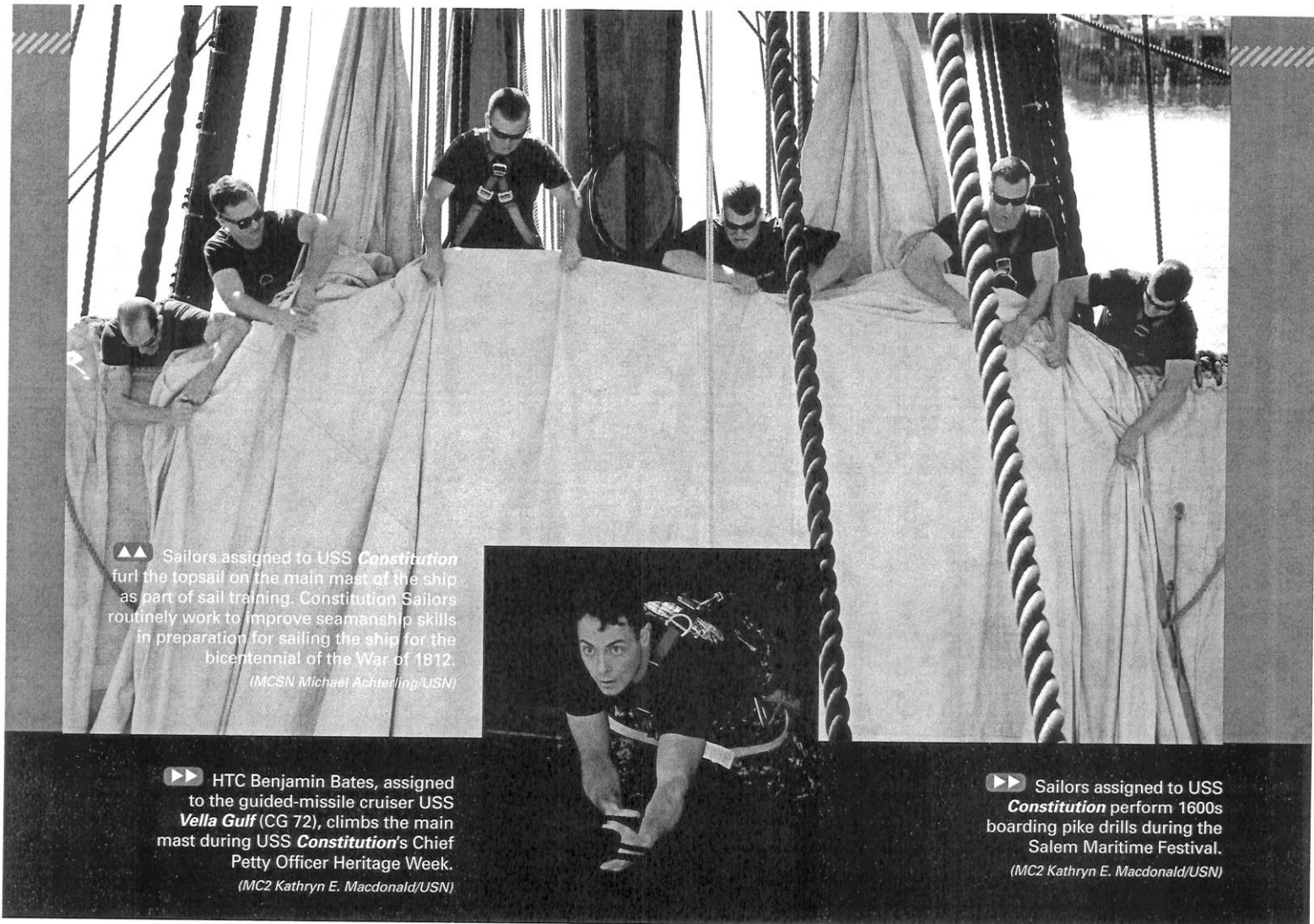
CONNECTING PAST TO PRESENT

By MCSN Michael Achterling, USS **Constitution** Public Affairs

“Silence!” shouts the gun captain of USS **Constitution's** gun team ten. “Haul in your gun!” Immediately, the 12 Sailors assigned to gun team ten move in unison, grabbing lines, hauling the massive 6,500-pound long gun inboard to the call of, “Two, six, heave! Two, six, heave!” ➤

▶ USS **Constitution** sets sail for the first time since 1997 during an underway commemorating the Battle of Guerriere. (MCC William Clark/USN)





▲▲ Sailors assigned to USS *Constitution* furl the topsail on the main mast of the ship as part of sail training. Constitution Sailors routinely work to improve seamanship skills in preparation for sailing the ship for the bicentennial of the War of 1812.
(MCSN Michael Achterling/USN)

▶▶ HTC Benjamin Bates, assigned to the guided-missile cruiser USS *Vella Gulf* (CG 72), climbs the main mast during USS *Constitution*'s Chief Petty Officer Heritage Week.
(MC2 Kathryn E. Macdonald/USN)

▶▶ Sailors assigned to USS *Constitution* perform 1600s boarding pike drills during the Salem Maritime Festival.
(MC2 Kathryn E. Macdonald/USN)

"That's well," says the "Old Ironsides" gun captain with a sense of approval. "Load with cartridge. Wad your shot and ram home!"

The gun team in a flurry of activity loads the giant gun with a small sack filled with eight pounds of gun powder. Quickly, the cartridge is plunged to the rear of the barrel with an oversized rammer. Almost instantly, wadding, which is made up of small bits of line, is given to the loader, followed immediately by a 24-pound round cannon shot and more wadding. The items are forced down the barrel by the rammer and come to rest right in front of the powder cartridge.

"Run out your gun," shouts the gun captain, knowing speed is of the utmost importance, the enemy ship is fast approaching. The gun crew mans the hauling lines, and to a familiar call, moves the giant weapon with its ordnance into position out the open gun port. Once in position, the gun captain spikes the powder hole at the top of the gun, checking to ensure the powder is dry

and ready to fire. Happy with the result, he pours fine-grain gunpowder from his powder horn down the hole leading to the cartridge.

"Aim your gun," says the gun captain. Only with an accurate shot will the most damage be inflicted upon the enemy vessel. "Stand by!" All hands turn away from the huge weapon and cover their ears.

"Fire!" The gun captain pulls the lanyard attached to the flintlock atop the gun. The hammer is released, forcing the flint to strike a piece of steel that creates a spark, and the loose powder that collected atop the powder hole is ignited. The long gun then erupts with a furious explosion, kicking the gun inboard 4-6 feet at a speed of almost 35 miles per hour, and the loaded 24-pound projectile is hurtled through the air toward its intended target.

These were the actions of *Constitution* Sailors over 200 years ago, keeping the seas safe from corsairs, privateers, and unfriendly nations, but these are also the actions of the current crew of "Old

Ironsides" whose mission is to preserve, promote, and protect the living piece of history that is *Constitution*. They do so by conducting gun drills and sail training, going to Navy Weeks across the country, giving tours of the ship's history to the thousands of visitors who eagerly come to learn, and volunteering in the community.

"These are 21st century Sailors who do all the same things our Fleet Sailors do but also understand and practice 19th century naval skills," said Cmdr. Matt Bonner, *Constitution*'s 72nd commanding officer. "They are able to share our rich naval history with the public and explain how it relates to what the Navy does today in keeping the seas free for everyone."

Constitution was an active-duty Navy warship from 1797 to 1855. She participated in the Quasi-War with France from 1798 to 1801, the first Barbary War from 1801 to 1805, and the War of 1812 from 1812 to 1815. Approximately 15,000 Sailors have served aboard *Constitution* through its 215-year history.

"History is still being made everyday.

The fact that she is 215 years old and is still with us gives a sense of continuum through the Sailors that serve aboard her today," said Margherita Desy, historian for Naval History and Heritage Command Detachment Boston. "Through memory, and recalling the spectacular moments of this one ship's history and the men who served aboard her, gives the visitors a sense of appreciation and the understanding of

why we still need navies around the world."

Constitution's mission today is to educate people about the ship's history as well as take part in community outreach. Currently, her crew is commemorating the bicentennial of the War of 1812 through public demonstrations and educational activities at eight Navy weeks across the U.S. in 2012.

"Navy Weeks increase awareness about our capabilities and relevance to national security in cities that do not have a significant Navy presence. In many landlocked cities, **Constitution** Sailors are the most effective way the Navy can improve understanding about the War of 1812. USS **Constitution** crew is one of the Navy's premier outreach assets and an invaluable part of the Navy Week program. They teach people about the Navy's history and why the Navy is still relevant today," said Cmdr. Kim Marks, Director of the Navy Office of Community Outreach. "**Constitution**

Sailors are all incredibly skilled spokespeople for the Navy who are able to tailor their interactive history presentation to engage each group at their level, from kindergarteners to high school students and even adults. By explaining what life was like for Sailors in 1812, the **Constitution** crew gets people excited about history. They also show that the Navy's mission has not changed in over 200 years: protecting ships from piracy and keeping the seas safe to preserve the American way of life."

Constitution is the world's oldest commissioned warship afloat and welcomes more than 500,000 visitors per year. Most do not know how the Navy was created; some of these visitors have never encountered or interacted with a Sailor before.

"The core of a Sailor was the same then as it is today," said Cryptologic Technician (Interpretive) 1st Class Scott Bartlett, **Constitution's** command historian. "The integrity of a Sailor, their honor, their courage, their commitment, to be able to overcome obstacles to get the mission done still holds true 215 years later."

Constitution also encourages Sailors assigned to the ship to volunteer in the community. This year, **Constitution** received the President's Volunteer Service Award for the third consecutive year. The President's Volunteer Service Award program was created as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service.

"Boston is our home. By volunteering and helping out our community, it gives the Sailors stationed here a sense of pride," said Sonar Technician (Submarine) (SS) 2nd Class Thomas Rooney, **Constitution's** volunteer service coordinator. "It's a wonderful honor to be stationed on this historic ship with so many Sailors willing to go the extra-mile to lend a hand to someone or a community that needs help."

History is defined as a continuous, systematic narrative of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, and person. **Constitution's** history is still being written today. There is no finish line in sight for this historic ship. Through the Sailors that serve aboard her, their dedication and hard work, this ship is truly a national icon and will never be forgotten. *SW*

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